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October 6, 2017

The Honorable Michael Huerta
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 1022
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Huerta:

I write to draw your attention once again to the ongoing problems related to airplane noise after full implementation of NextGen in the Southern California Metroplex project. I have heard from hundreds of constituents with complaints about incessant noise from airplanes.

As you know, the narrowing of the flight paths that is a signature feature of the NextGen effort has concentrated the effects of noise over specific neighborhoods, including in my district, that now suffer under a constant barrage of airplanes overhead. You have heard about this problem again and again, from Phoenix to Washington, DC to Northern California. We all understand that the safety of the flying public is the first priority of the FAA, as it should be. I also understand that NextGen is intended to increase efficiency for airlines and their customers. The FAA, however, made some key representations to my office and to people of the Southern California region during the comment period for the SoCal Metroplex, representations that have proven inaccurate, at least as of right now. Those representations included that after implementation, airplanes should be able to stay higher for longer. But we are now told that having even a majority of planes flying at the published altitude may be years away, as it depends on full implementation of Terminal Sequencing and Spacing (TSAS) tools across carriers and airports.

I believe, however, that there are concrete steps that you and your agency could take now and in the near future to mitigate some of the worst effects being inflicted on my constituents. These steps are laid out in great detail by the LAX Community Noise Roundtable in a letter to you dated September 23, 2017. They are also echoed in a letter to you from members of the Los Angeles City Council dated October 2, 2017.

The steps I will describe in this letter fall into three categories:

- 1) Greater adherence to published minimum altitudes;
- 2) Eliminating night flights below minimum altitudes; and
- 3) Working with LAWA and others to reduce night flights over homes whenever safety permits.

GREATER ADHERENCE TO PUBLISHED MINIMUM ALTITUDES

Analysis of FAA data by LAWA and referenced in the above-mentioned letters describes the prevalence of planes flying below, in some cases well-below, the altitude specified in the published procedures. For example, in any given month since SoCal Metroplex Phase III implementation on April 27, 2017, as many as half to two-thirds of the aircraft using the North Downwind Arrival procedure have flown lower than the published minimums at the DAHJR waypoint. Air traffic controllers appear to be routinely instructing pilots to deviate downward. Where safety permits, planes should fly as much as possible at or above the published altitudes, with lateral deviations considered as an alternative to vertical deviations to achieve the required separation of aircraft.

ELIMINATE NIGHTTIME LOW ALTITUDES

Even if heavy traffic or other safety factors could be understood to require flying lower during the daytime, traffic in the late hours is much lighter and there appears to be no reason for air traffic controllers to direct or allow planes to fly lower than the published minimum altitudes. Controllers and airline pilots must give a much greater priority to adhering as closely as possible to these minimum altitudes wherever and whenever possible, with few exceptions allowed during the midnight to 6:30am window.

WORKING WITH LAWA TO REDUCE NEED FOR NIGHT FLIGHTS OVER HOMES

Multiple factors at LAX have contributed to deviations from the practice of both taking off and landing over the ocean between the crucial hours of midnight to 6:30am. One of those factors is the closure of a runway in order to conduct maintenance, upgrades and/or construction. LAWA management is working to place even greater focus on minimizing the number of runway closure windows. I request that you make every effort to assure that LAWA has the maximum flexibility and cooperation available from the FAA in order to consolidate and manage activities on runways that require closure in order to reduce nighttime deviations from Over-Ocean Operations.

These steps and more are laid out in great detail in the two above-referenced letters sent to you this week, to which I hope you will respond as soon as possible. I will be following the result of their requests closely.

The FAA's own website notes that noise, particularly disruptions to sleep, can have serious, ongoing health effects, and mentions a related research plan. I urge the FAA to pursue that plan, and to take action now to address aggressively the onslaught of noise in our communities, with a special emphasis on night noise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Bass". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Karen" and last name "Bass" clearly legible.

Karen Bass
Member of Congress